**UNITED NATIONS RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

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# PARKS, PEOPLE AND PROFESSIONALS

## PUTTING "PARTICIPATION" INTO PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT

**by Michel P. Pimbert and Jules N. Pretty**



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The **United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)** is an autonomous agency that engages in multi-disciplinary research on the social dimensions of contemporary problems affecting development. Its work is guided by the conviction that, for effective development policies to be formulated, an understanding of the social and political context is crucial. The Institute attempts to provide governments, development agencies, grassroots organizations and scholars with a better understanding of how development policies and processes of economic, social and environmental change affect different social groups. Working through an extensive network of national research centres, UNRISD aims to promote original research and strengthen research capacity in developing countries.

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# ◆ Preface

Under its programme on Environment, Sustainable Development and Social Change, the Institute is currently focusing on the social dimensions of policies and initiatives for environmental protection. A series of case and thematic studies, carried out by UNRISD in collaboration with WWF and other organizations, has focused on the social and environmental impacts of protected areas in developing countries.

The remarkable expansion in the network of national parks and protected areas in recent years has made an important contribution to the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems, and has also been instrumental in generating employment and foreign exchange earnings through tourism. However, the absorption of vast areas into strictly protected régimes has had other long-term social, economic and environmental effects as well. The impacts on local livelihoods and culture in particular have not received adequate attention during project design and implementation. In some cases, lack of attention to human needs has resulted in further acts of encroachment and poaching, as well as sabotage and the unnecessary destruction of natural resources and biodiversity. This programme investigates these undesirable processes and attempts to indicate how protected areas management could be better integrated with the socio-economic development of surrounding areas. In particular, the research programme seeks to encourage debate and imaginative thinking among individuals and institutions with interest in the social dimensions of environmental changes and conservation policies. This thematic paper is the result of a joint effort between the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), UNRISD and the World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF-International).

This paper is a critique of current protected areas management systems: it argues that the present style of conservation has neglected the needs and aspirations of local people, their indigenous knowledge and management systems, their institutions and social organizations, and the value to them of wild resources. The dominant ideology underpinning this conservation has been that people are bad for natural resources. Policies and practice have sought to exclude people and so discourage local participation. As a result, social conflicts have grown in and around many protected areas, and conservation goals themselves have frequently been threatened.

This paper asserts that conservation itself needs rethinking. In the dominant "positivist-rationalist" paradigm, professionals assume that they know best and so can analyse and influence the management of natural resources in the ways they desire. This approach is generally highly reductionist, taking into account only the presence of a particular species or total species diversity as indicators of value. But this preservationist ideology fails to take into account the growing body of empirical evidence that local people have long influenced natural systems in ways that improve biodiversity together with their livelihoods. Many apparently "primary" forests or habitats did in fact support large numbers of people in the past, whose actions significantly influenced what remains today.

The paper asserts that it is necessary to find ways of putting local people back into conservation. Only certain types of participation will result in sustainable conservation. Alternative systems of learning and interaction will help this process of participation and contribute to more sustainable management of protected areas. The paper concludes that for this vision to succeed, a "new professionalism" is required, as well as supportive national and international policies.

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Director

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# PART I: THE CONTRADICTIONS OF CONVENTIONAL PROTECTED AREA PROGRAMMES

## ◆ The Designation of Protected Areas

The first protected areas were established during the last century. In the industrializing countries, governments began to set aside areas of particular scenic beauty or uniqueness exclusively for conservation. But the creation of most of these protected areas involved the exclusion of local people. In the USA, for example, on a tract of hot springs and geysers in northwestern Wyoming, the Yellowstone National Park was established in 1872. The inhabitants of Yellowstone, mainly Crow and Shoshone native Americans, either left for reservations or were driven out by the army, which then managed the park until 1916 (Morrison, 1993). In Africa, conservationists usually worked in isolation from the local communities and dissociated themselves from development activities. The leading conservationists were foresters from the Imperial Institute of Forestry at Oxford (United Kingdom). Their management philosophy emphasized that "the public good was best served through the protection of forests and water resources, even if this meant the displacement of local communities" (McCracken,1987:190).

This neglect of resident people in parks and reserves persists to this day. Until quite recently, few plans for protected area management made any mention of the people living inside forests, coastal strips, wetlands and other biodiversity-rich areas earmarked for conservation. But these areas are often heavily populated. In South America, for example, 86 per cent of national parks have people living in them and using the natural resources of the parks to some extent (Amend and Amend, 1992). In India, a study of 171 national parks and sanctuaries conducted in the mid-1980s found that there were 1.6 million people living in the 118 parks that were inhabited (Kothari et al., 1989). By 1993, protected areas in India had already displaced some 600,000 tribal people, some 20 per cent of the country's tribal people. According to social activists in India, as many people may be displaced again if the Ministry of Environment and Forests proceeds with its plans to establish a further 150 national parks and 650 wildlife sanctuaries in the next few years (PRIA, 1993).

The problem is that most national parks in the developing world have been created on the model pioneered at Yellowstone. Some remarkable exceptions apart, the basic underlying attitude is isolationist, whereby both the design and management seek to protect the park or reserve from local communities. Decisions on which land or water